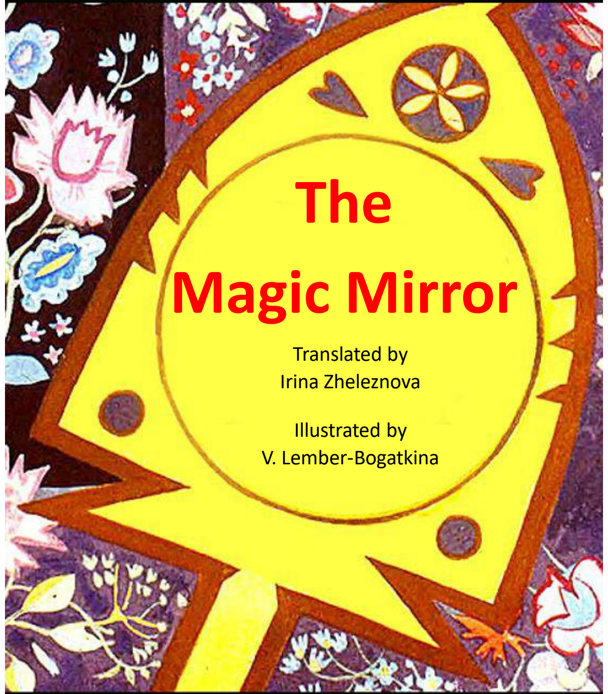
Estonian Fairy Tale

The Magic Mirror

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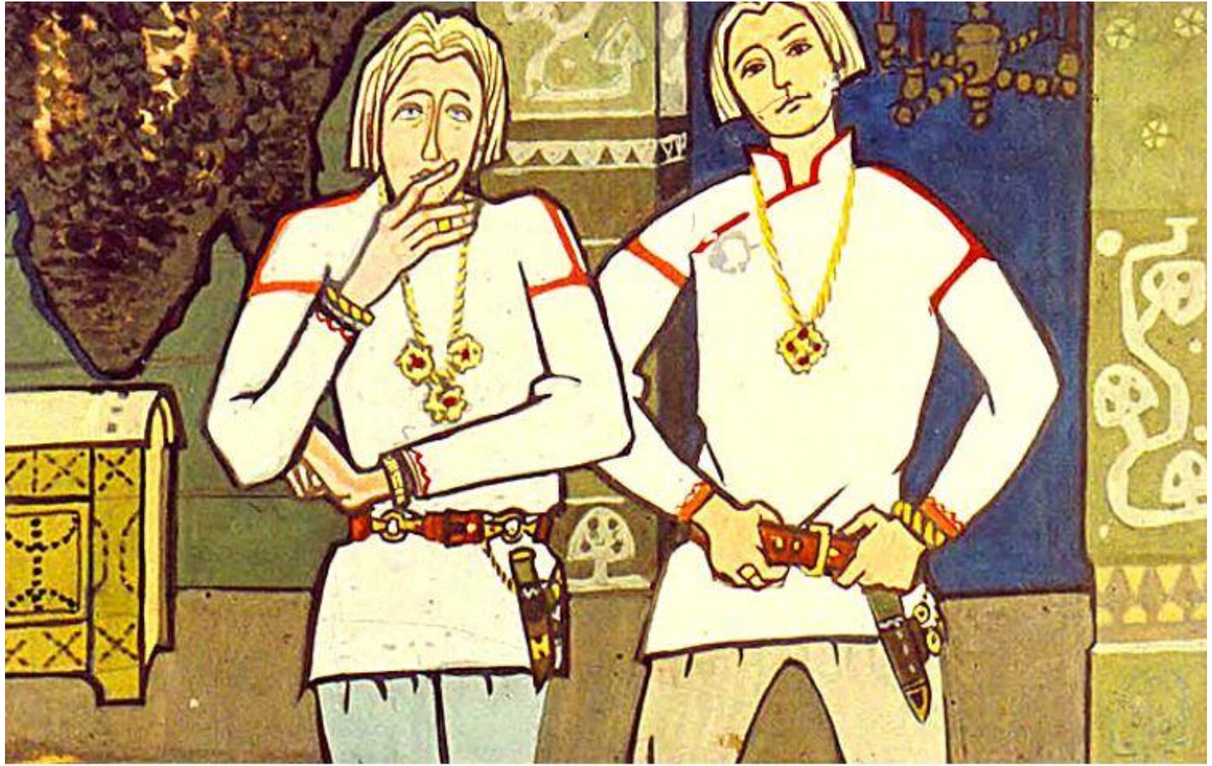


Once upon a time, in years long past, there lived a king of great renown and very rich. He had more money and gems than ten kings taken together.

Because he was so rich the king took it into his head that he would never grow old. But this was not to be: old age comes to all, rich or poor. The king was much put out about this. How could such a thing be?

Was there no difference between him and the last beggar in his kingdom? He was as rich as ten kings taken together, but his hair was turning white and falling out just the same.

"That is not the way things should be," the king decided and he summoned his sons to his side.



Now, he had three sons but he only summoned the two older ones, for his youngest son was a simple soul who was mocked at and called a fool by his brothers. But so good-natured was he that he never took offence at this.

The two sons came at his bidding, and the king said to them:

"When I was a child I heard that there was a magic mirror somewhere on earth in which one had only to look to turn young again. I will give half my kingdom to whichever of you brings me this mirror. Find it for me, and you will make me happy and yourselves, too. Prepare to set off at once and take with you whatever you need."



The sons were overjoyed and asked the king to give them a coach and six horses and a whole sack of gold besides.

The king gave them all they asked for, and the sons saddled the horses, put the sack of gold in the coach and called the coachman. Then they got into the coach and set off on their journey.



The youngest son learned of this and he came to his father and asked to be sent in search of the magic mirror, too.

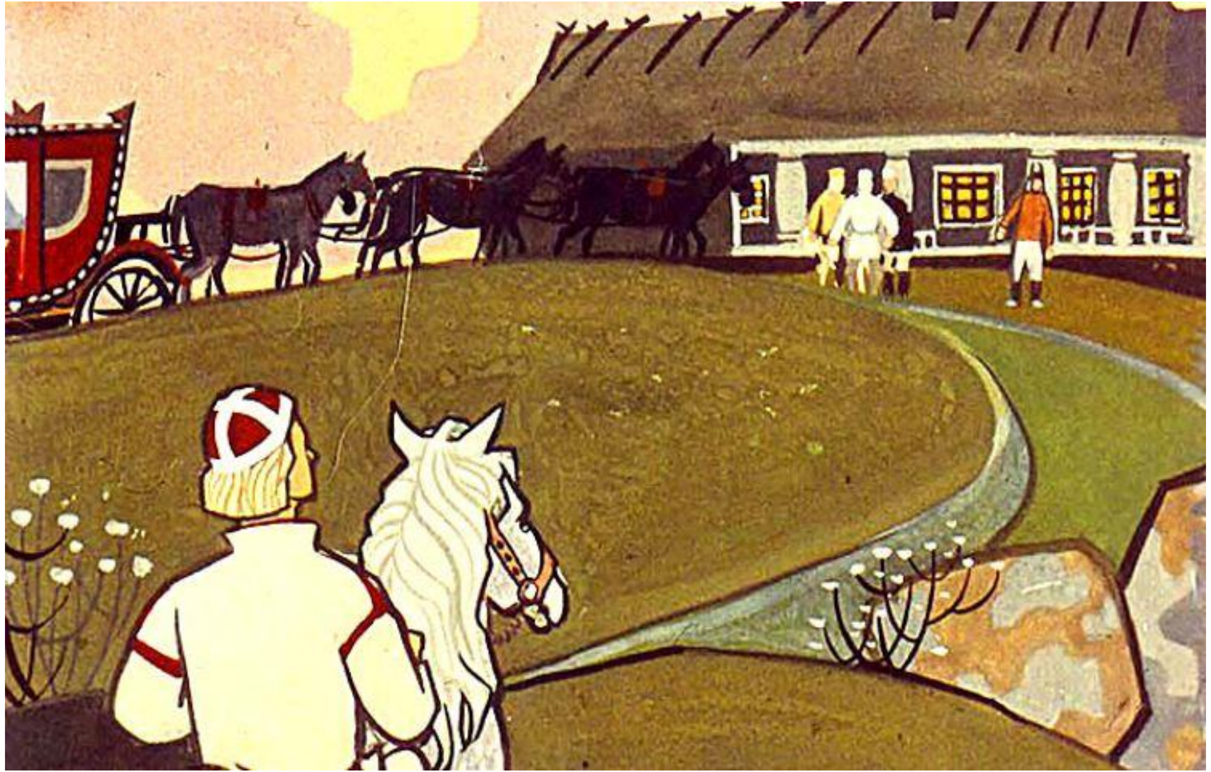
Said the king, laughing:

"Where would a fool like you go? Your foolishness will be the end of you. Better go and take a walk, your brothers will do well enough without you."



But the fool was very hurt at being thought too young and foolish to join his brothers and would not be put off.

"Oh, very well! " the king finally agreed. "Let it be as you ask. Only don't think that I'll trust you with six horses and a sack of gold. Go as you are, and if you get into trouble blame yourself."



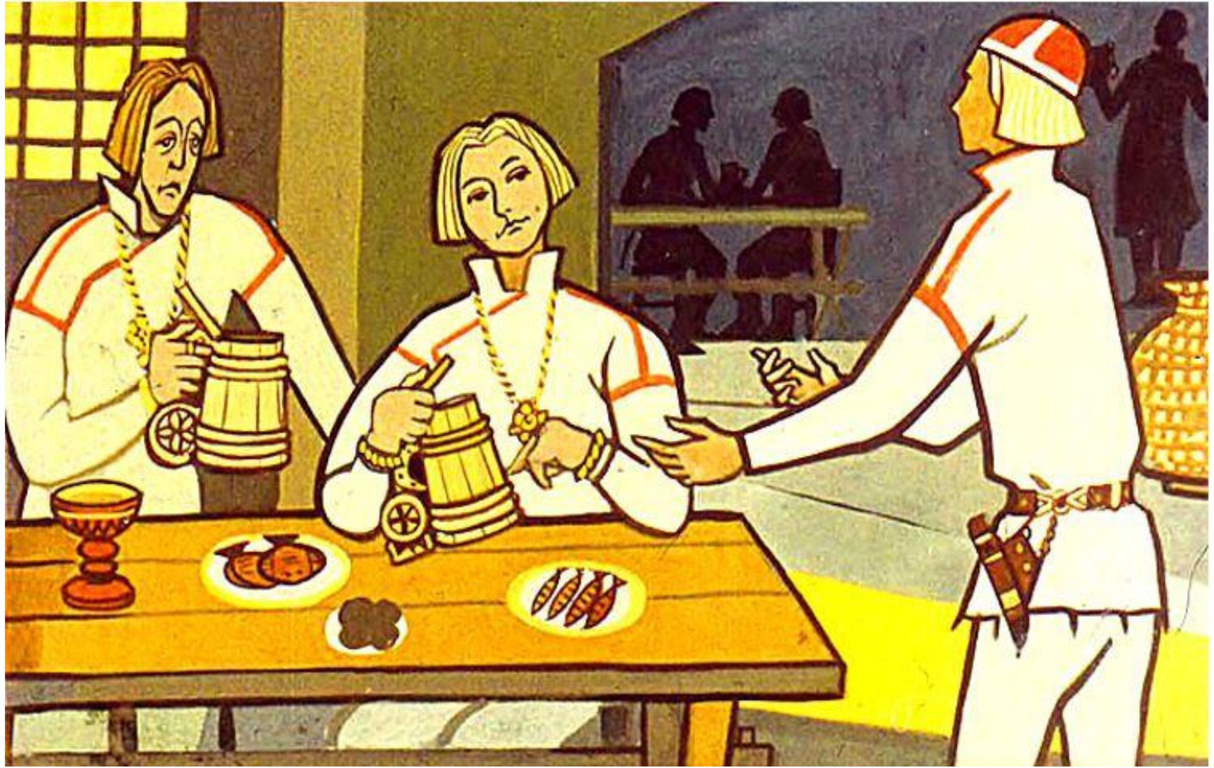
But the fool was very pleased, for it was enough for him that he had been allowed to go.

He counted his money and found that he had only ten thalers, which meant that, however much he wanted to, he could not buy himself a good horse. In the end, all he could get was a very old and run-down grey nag.

The fool got on the nag's back and set off. The nag dragged painfully along, going into a jog-trot now and then, but this did not trouble the fool, for, thought he, I am on my way, so what more do I need!

Toward evening he rode up to a large inn. A coach and six stood at its door.

"This means my brothers are here! " said he to himself. "I'll go in and find them and perhaps they will take me with them."



He tethered his nag and came into the inn and when his brothers saw him they burst out laughing.

"Where are you off to? " asked they.

"I want to find the magic mirror," said the fool. "Take me with you and we'll be all the gayer for it."

"Go away, fool! If anything happens to you we'll be the ones to answer for it."



Now, this made the fool feel very bad indeed. He left the inn, got on the nag's back again and rode on.

And the two older brothers stayed in the inn and would go no further in search of the mirror.

"The wolves will eat up the fool together with his grey nag!" laughed they. "A fine mirror he'll get then."



On and on rode the fool and at last he came to a great leafy forest. He was about to ride round it when he saw a narrow little path leading into it. This he decided to follow, for, thought he, it is in a forest that one always finds things.

The whole day long he rode, and, feeling bored and lonely, broke a branch off a tree and cut out a little pipe for himself.



He rode for a day, he rode for a second day, and on the third day he reached a small glade in which, beneath a mighty oak, stood a poor little hut.

Wanting to come into the hut, he decided to ride up closer, but before he could do so, a grey little old woman came out on to the porch.

"Well, well! Someone to see me at last! " said she. "I saw the forest die and rot away and another grow up, so long have I been here, but not once in all this time did I see a living soul. What brings you here?"



"I am looking for a mirror, Grandma," the fool explained. "Not an ordinary one, mind, but a magic one, in which one has only to look to turn young again. And as my father does not want to grow old, he sent me in search of it. Do you know where I can find it, Grandma?"

"No, my son, I don't, this is the first I hear of such a mirror. But I have a sister who is even older than I am and she may know something about it. Why don't you go to see her? It will take you three days to get to her house."



The fool thanked her and rode on and in three days' time he reached the house of the old woman's older sister. And was she surprised to see him!

"What brings you here?" asked she.

The fool told her about the mirror and asked where it was to be found.



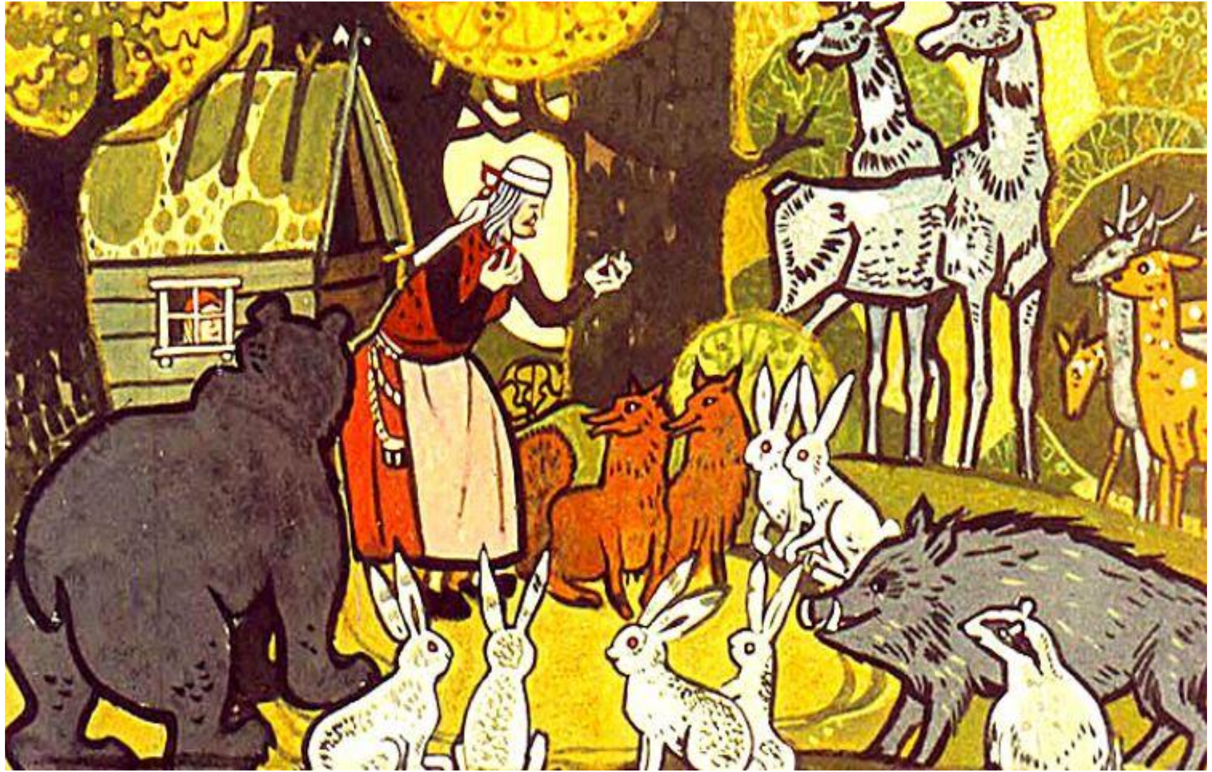
"That is something I can't tell you," said the old woman. "I heard about some such thing in my youth, but where it is I don't know. But perhaps my older sister knows. She is the wisest and the oldest of the three of us. Why don't you go to see her? It will take you three days to get to her house."



The fool thanked her and rode on and in three days' time he reached the house of the oldest of the old women. And she was more surprised to see him than any of them!

"What brings you here?" asked she.

The fool told her about the mirror and asked where it was to be found.



"That is something I can't tell you," said the old woman. "I heard about some such thing in my youth, but where it is I don't know. But perhaps one of my servants knows. You'd better get off your horse and come into my house."

The fool came into the hut and it was so bright and clean there that he was fairly dazzled.

The old woman took a long, carved whistle from a shelf and came out on to the porch with it. She blew hard once, and lo! — the whole forest came alive and rustled as if the grass were being trod by many, many feet. The fool looked out of the window and saw that all the beasts of the forest had gathered by the hut.



The old woman talked to them and came back to her guest again.

"No, my forest servants know nothing about the mirror," said she. "I'll call my other servants — perhaps they have heard something about it."

And she took another carved whistle from the shelf, and, coming out on to the porch again, blew even harder than before.

And again a rustling began in the forest — only it was not the grass that rustled this time but the branches, making a sound like the arms of many windmills whirling round and round. The fool looked out of the window and saw that all the birds of the air had flocked to the hut.

The old woman talked to them and came back to her guest again.

"No," said she, "these servants of mine know no more than the first. But I have one other servant, the wisest of them all. If he has not heard of the mirror, then that means that no such thing exists."

The old woman took a third carved whistle from the shelf and led the way to the porch.

"You can hear for yourself what the wisest of my servants has to say," said she. And she blew so hard that the fool's ears felt stopped up.

And now there came a rumbling sound and so loud was it that it seemed as if a storm were passing over the forest.

A large two-headed hawk came down on to the glade, and, perching on a stone, asked with a wave of his wings:

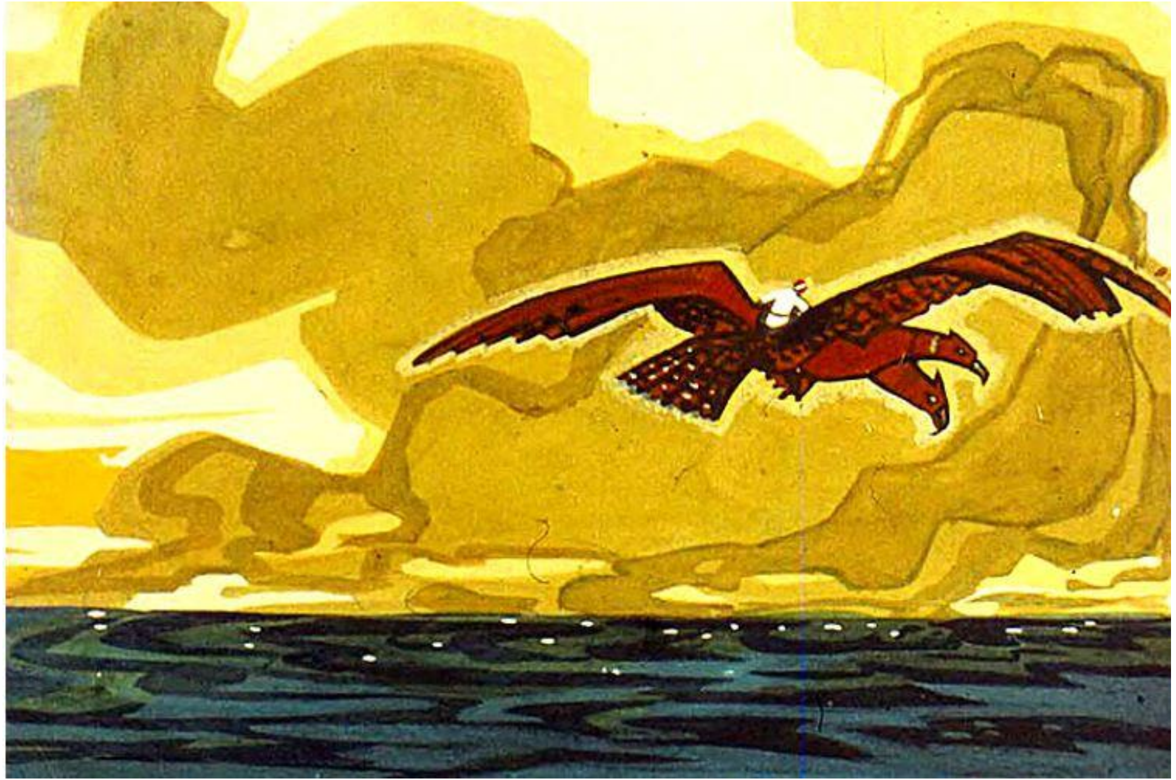
"What is it the Mother of the Forest wishes?"

"I wish to know where the magic mirror is to be found," said the old woman.



"I can tell you where," the hawk replied, "but it won't do you any good, for no man can ever hope to reach it. It is hidden in the chamber of a princess who lives on an island in the middle of the sea, and so high are the rocks that surround the island that no ship can put in to shore."

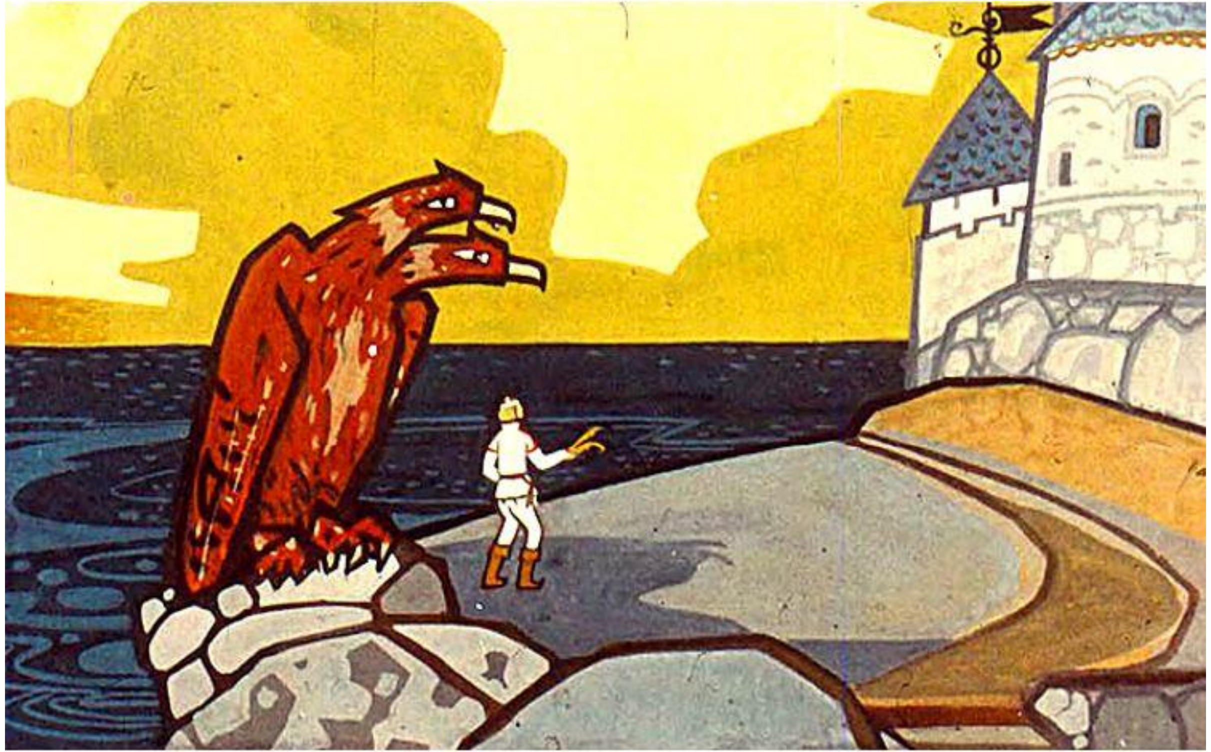
"What a man cannot do, you can," said the old woman. "Put this guest of mine on your back and carry him to the island! "



The hawk spread out his wings, the fool got on his back and up they soared to the sky.



For nine days and nine nights they flew and at last they reached the island in the middle of the sea.

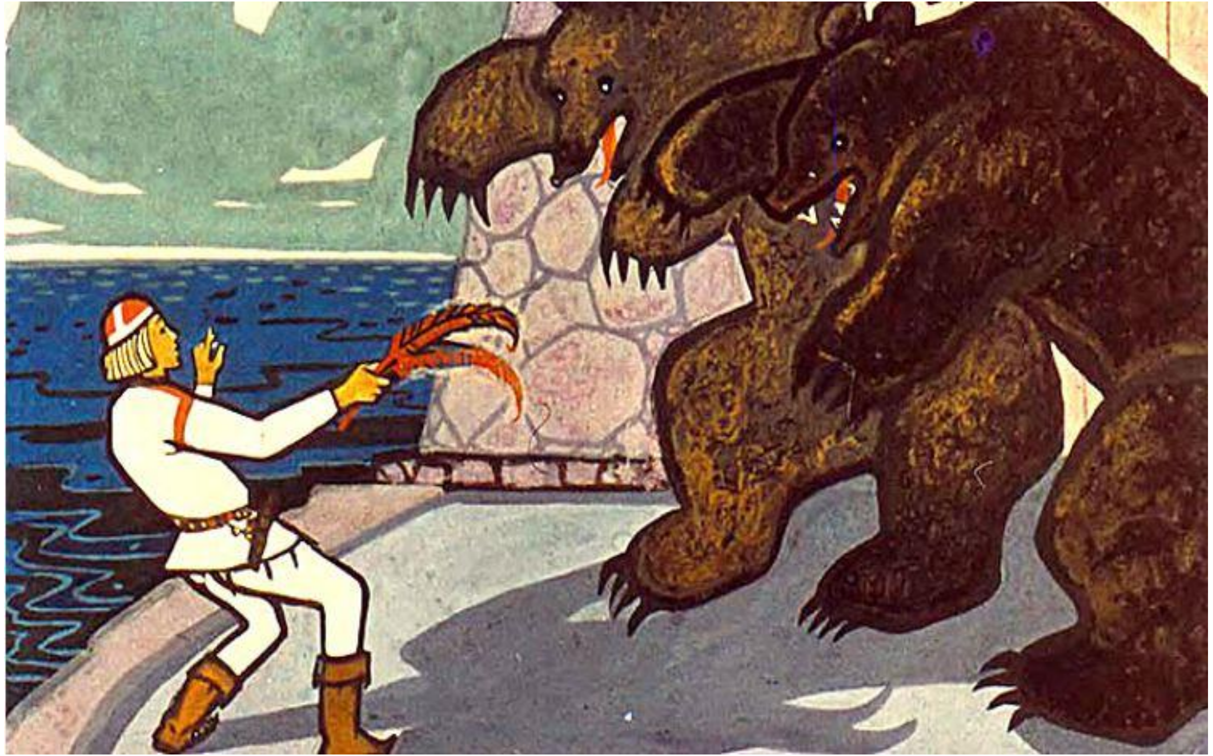


Said the hawk:

"When night comes you will go into the castle and steal the mirror from the princess. But mind you don't stay there too long or it'll be the end of us. The princess keeps the mirror at the head of her bed. Don't be afraid of waking her. She deeps so soundly at midnight that she would not awake even if you were to ride into her bed-chamber on horseback. Just seize the mirror and run! "

The hawk plucked out two feathers from his tail with his beak and said to the fool again:

"When you reach the gate you will see two bears. Throw each of them a feather and you'll be able to pass by."

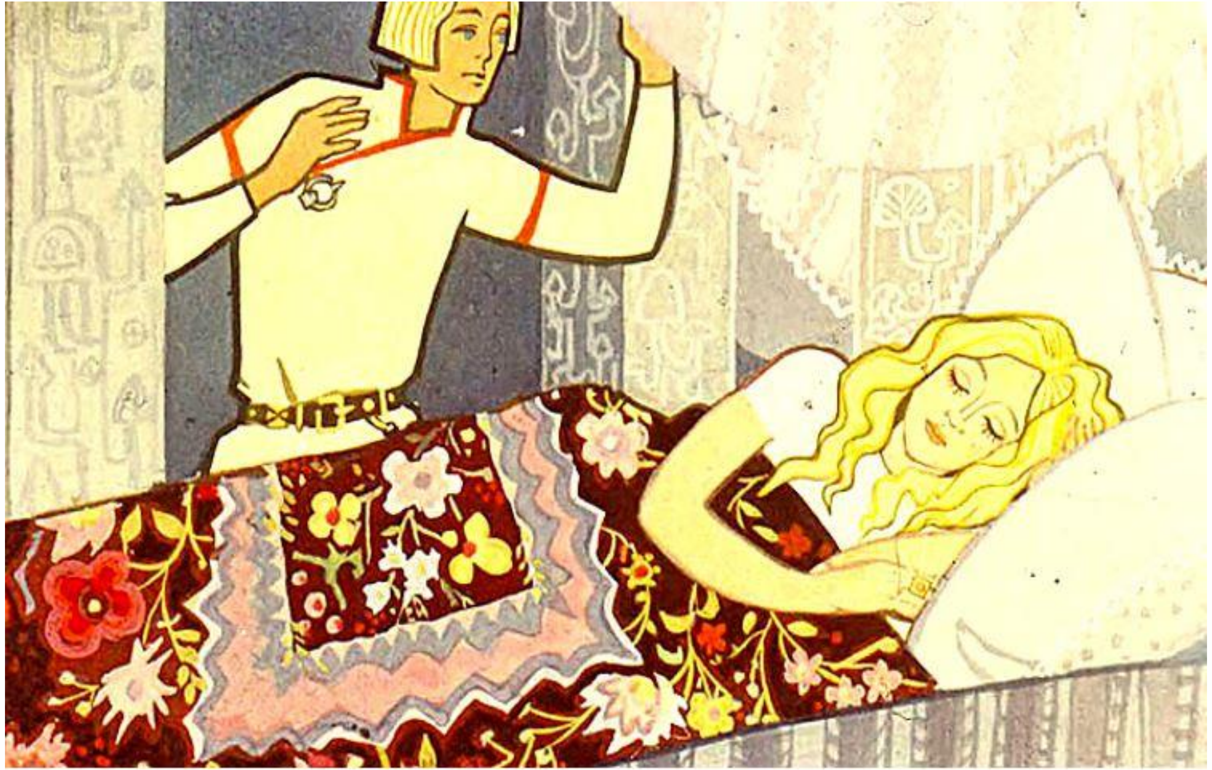


The fool took the feathers and went to the castle.

The bears saw him and at once reared up on their hind paws. But the fool quickly threw them the feathers and the bears snatched them up and fell asleep.



The fool now came into the castle, and though everyone in it seemed to be sleeping, it was as light there as on the sunniest day and it did not take him long to find the princess. He took the magic mirror from under the pillow, thrust it in his bosom and was about to slip out when he saw a table set with food and drink.



"There's time enough to run away," thought he. "I'll eat first."

And he set to and began to eat with great gusto.

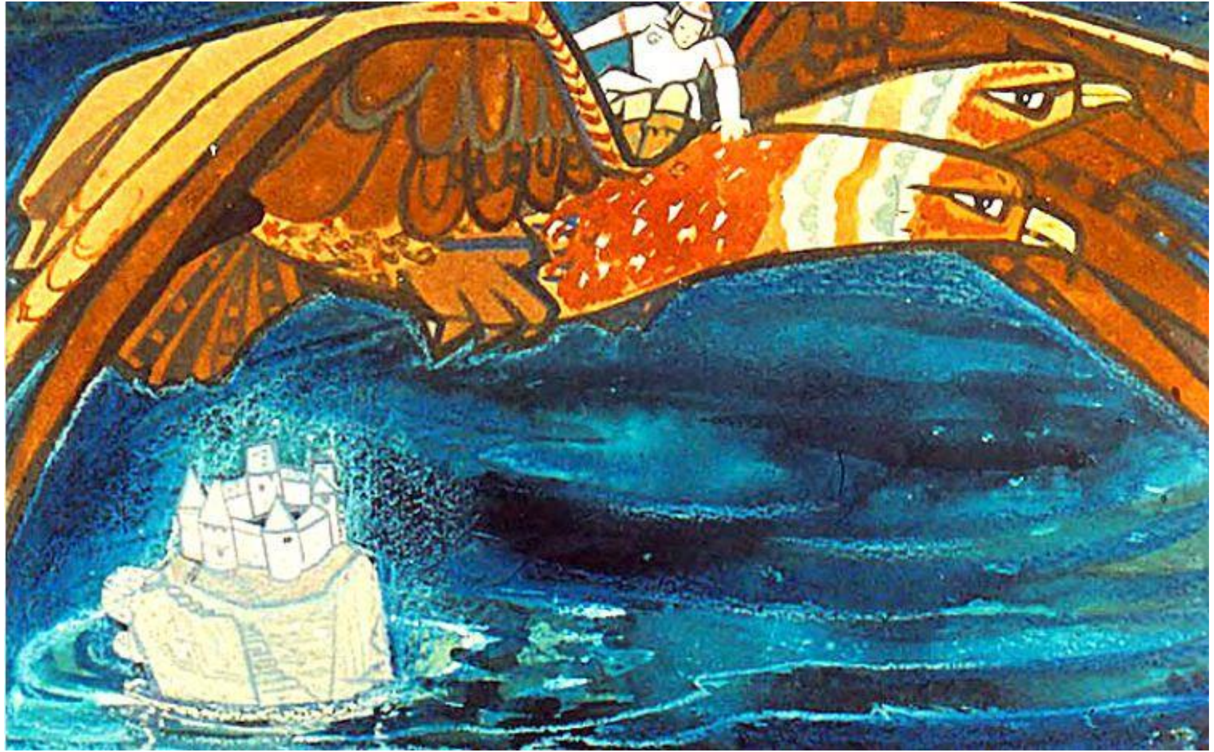
Said he to himself when he had gorged himself and could eat and drink no more:

"I wonder what the princess is like. I think I'd better take a look! "

He came up to the bed and so lovely was the princess that he could not get his fill gazing at her!



And on her finger there shone, bright as the sun, a most beautiful ring! The fool could not stop himself but took it off very gently and, this done, made off at a run for the gate.



The hawk was so angry at his long absence that he seized him by his caftan with his beak and soared up into the air. The bears were awake and they started up and rushed, growling, at the hawk but he was high overhead by then and out of their reach.

They flew over the sea and the hawk dropped down, dipped the fool in the water to his knees and rose up again.

A little farther on he dropped down a second time and dipped the fool in the water to his chest, and then, again, to his neck. The fool was terribly frightened and yelled and screamed in a frenzied voice every time. After a while he came to a little and asked of the hawk:

"What did you dip me in the sea like that for? Why, my heart was in my shoes I was so frightened. That is no way to joke."

"Let it be a lesson to you," said the hawk. Now you'll know what it was I went through waiting at the gate while you dawdled in the castle. You were frightened when I dipped you in the water to your knees. Well, so had I been when you were looking over the princess's bed-chamber and the bears lifted their heads. You were frightened when I dipped you in the water to your chest. Well, so had I been when you started eating and the bears sat up. You were frightened when I dipped you in the water to your neck. Well, so had I been — badly so — when you began to take off the ring from the princess's finger and the bears reared up on their hind legs. Why, had the princess wakened, they'd have torn me to pieces and don't think you'd have escaped alive, either!



"Thank God she did not wake! " the fool thought.

They flew to the house of the oldest' of the old women and showed her the mirror, and the old woman said:

"I have no use for it, I am much too old for it to do me any good. But you may have need of these."

And she gave the fool three switches.

"Just wave these switches," said she, "and your every wish will come true."



The fool thanked her, got on the back of his old nag again and rode off. He came to the house of the second old woman and showed her the mirror.

"I have no use for it, I am much too old for it to do me any good," said the old woman. "But you may have need of this."

And she gave the fool a little bag.

"If you have nothing to eat, undo this bag," said she, "and loaves of bread will come spilling out of it."

The fool thanked her, said goodbye and rode on again.



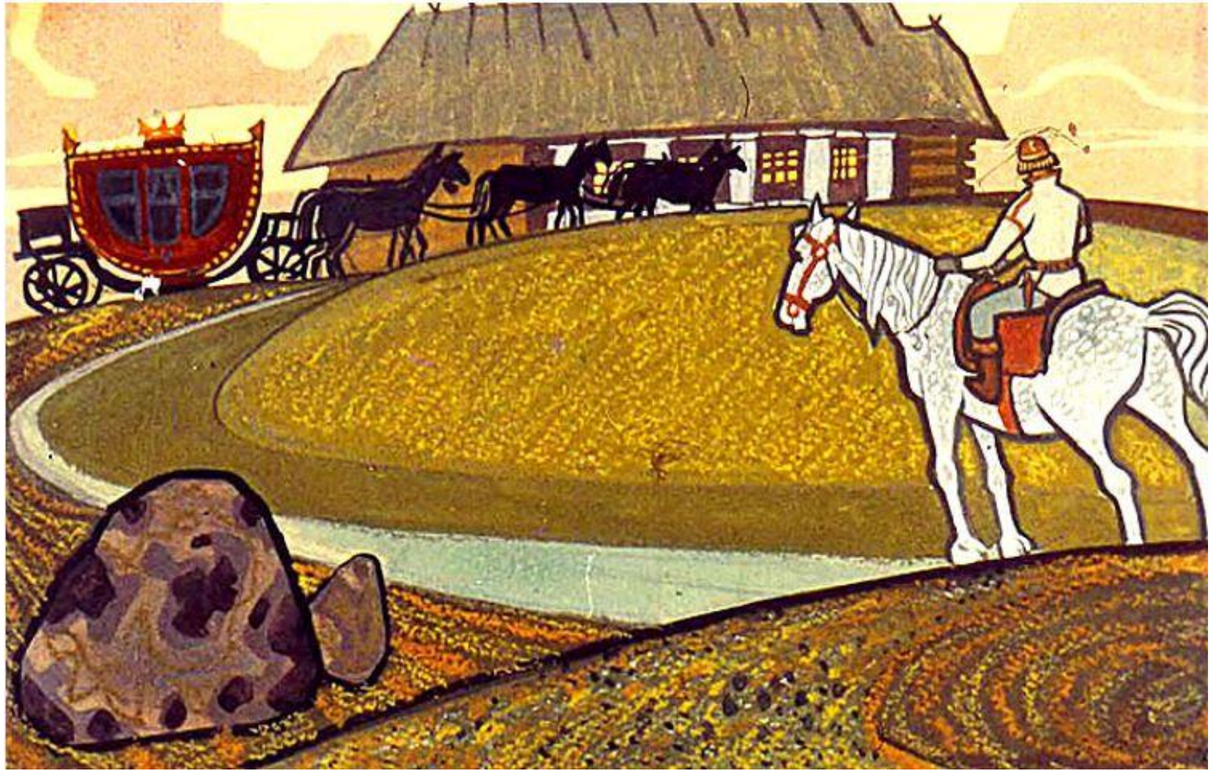
He came to the house of the youngest of the old women and showed her the mirror, and she said:

"I have no use for it, I am much too old for it to do me any good! But you may have need of these."

And she gave him a pair of scissors.

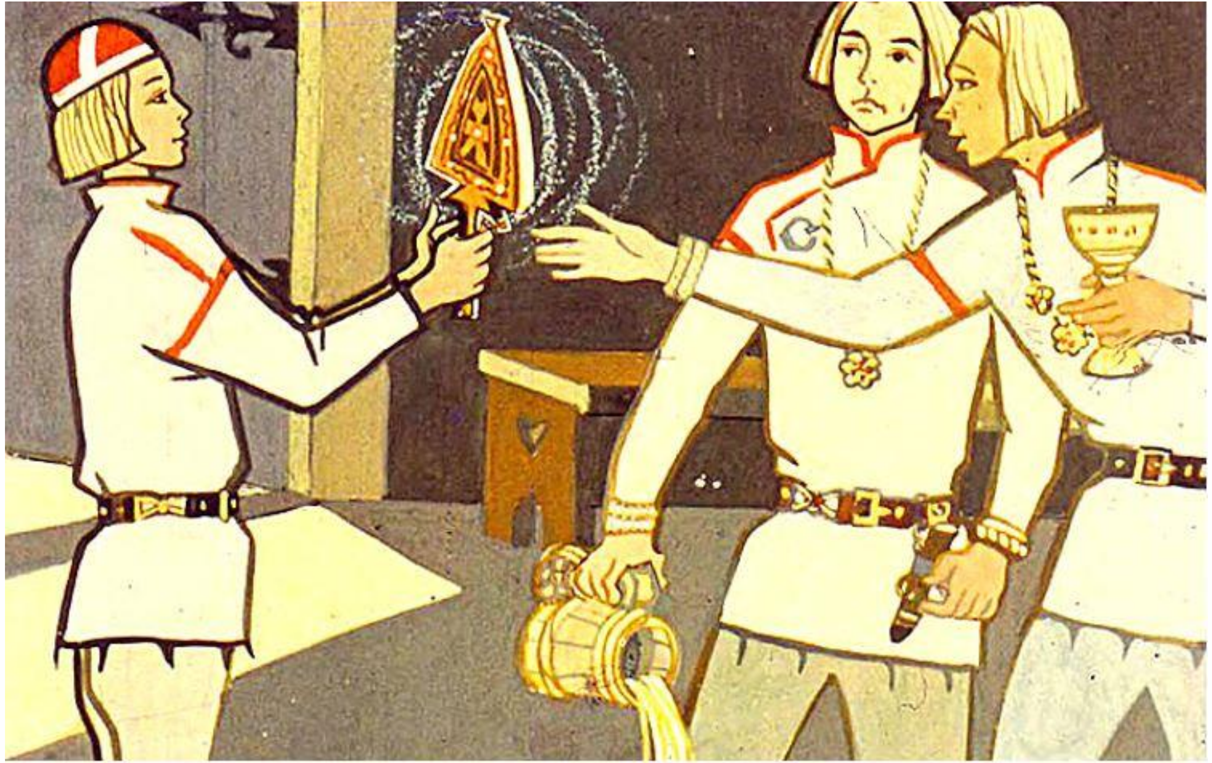
"If your clothes wear out," said she, "just click these scissors."

The fool thanked her, said goodbye and rode on.



He rode up to the self-same inn and saw that the coach and six stood by it just as before.

"I'll go in and find my brothers," said the fool to himself and he came into the inn.



His brothers saw him and said:

"Well, have you found the mirror?"

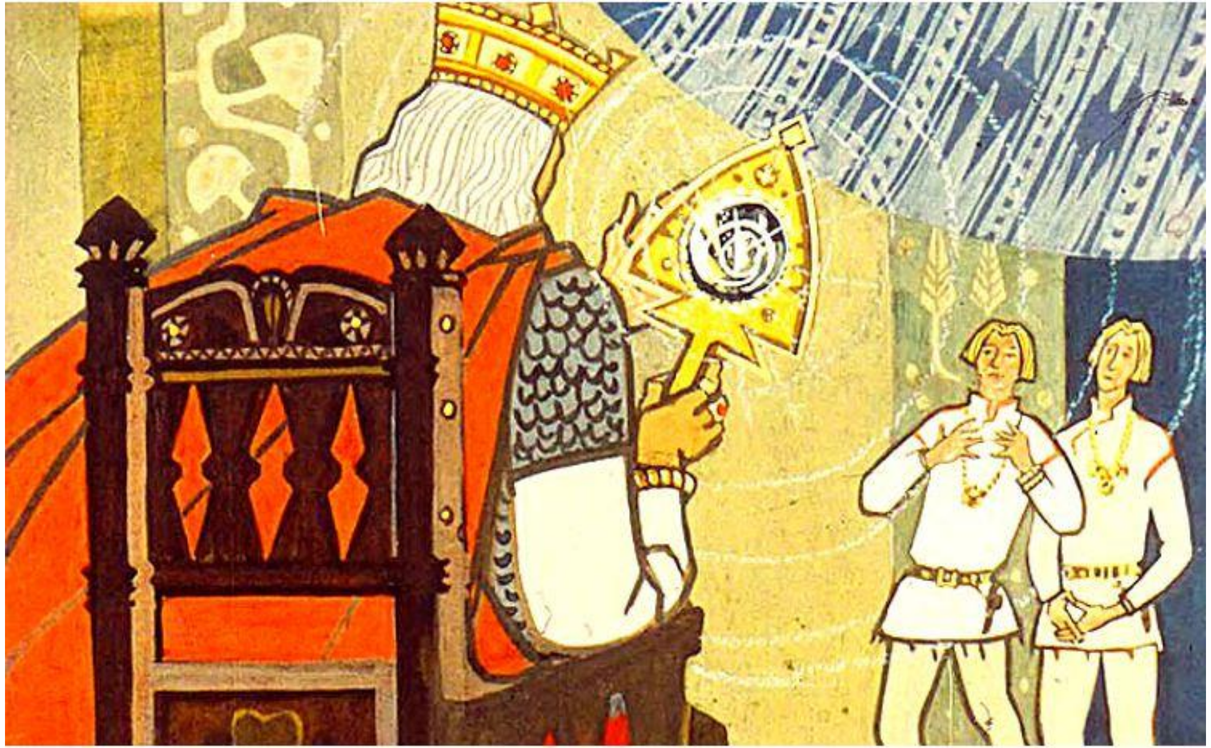
"So I have!" the fool replied.

The brothers then began to ply him with food and drink, and, when he was quite drunk, said:

"Come, fool, show us the mirror! What if it isn't a magic mirror after all?"

"Oh, yes it is!" said the fool and he brought out the mirror. The brothers looked in it and saw that it was indeed a magic mirror.

"A treasure if there ever was one!" said they. "You don't need it, we'll take it for ourselves."



And, taking the mirror, they went off with it.

"Now haven't we been lucky!" said they. "But don't try to give us away, fool, or we'll give you a drubbing you won't forget."

They came to their father and gave him the mirror and the moment he looked in it he turned young again.

"What fine clever fellows you are!" said he. "Here, take half my kingdom, for that is what I promised you.“

Now the fool came running and he wept and sobbed.

"It was I who found the mirror," said he. "My older brothers took it away from me! They stayed in the inn and never went anywhere at all."



"What a fool you are! " said his father.

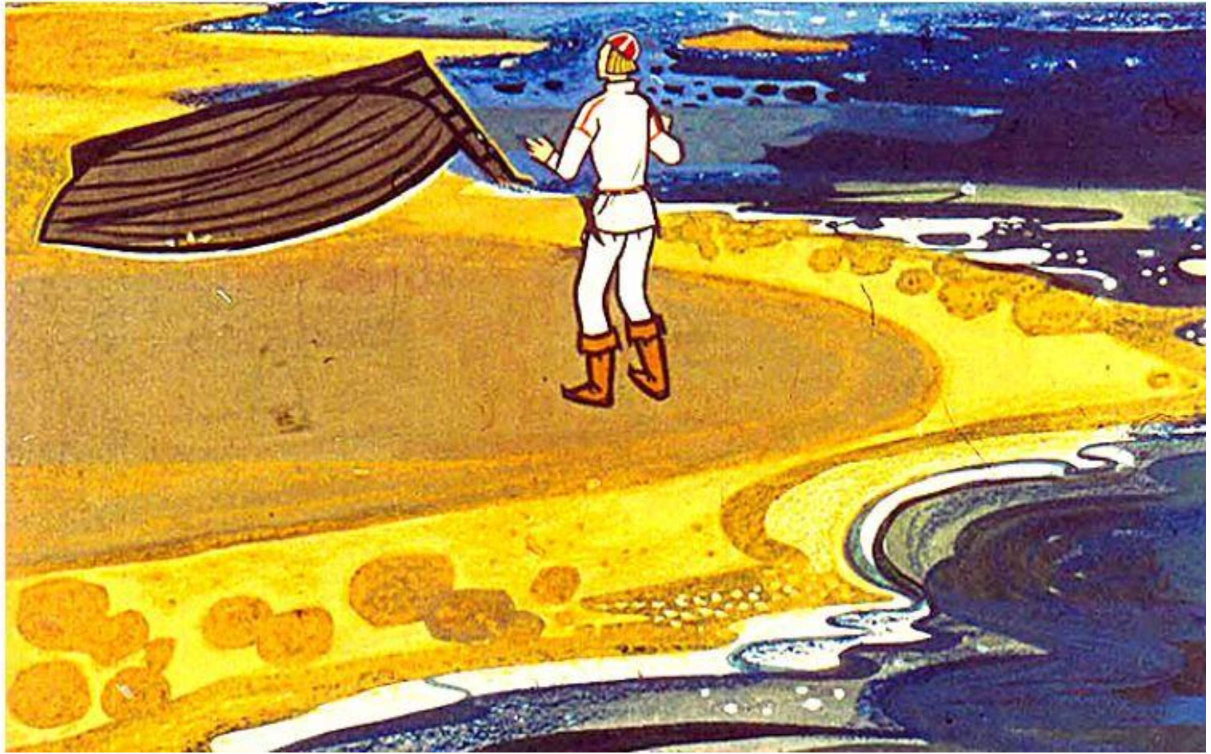
"A fool like that should not be allowed to live! " said the older brothers. "Have him put to death! "

The fool tried to explain how he had found the mirror and how he had flown on the hawk's back, but this only made the king angrier than ever.

"Take him to the seashore," said he to his older sons, "put him in a boat with no oars in it and push the boat into the sea."

The brothers seized the fool, put him in a boat with no oars in it and pushed it into the sea.

"The hawk will help you! " cried they, laughing.



The wind sent the fool's boat out into the open sea and the waves tossed it about for a long time, till at last they flung it on to some rocks. The fool looked to all sides of him and saw that he was on an island in the middle of the sea.

"My end has come," thought he. "To find myself on a desert island, of all places! I'd better try to drag the boat on to the shore at least."



He tried dragging the boat but found that this was more than he could do, for something that lay in his bosom was hindering him.

He thrust his hand in his shirt, and lo! — found the three switches that the oldest of the old women had given him.

"I forgot all about the old women's gifts!" thought he. "Now we'll see if they are truly magic gifts."

He took the switches, waved them once and said:

"Let a town grow up here and let there be many, many people in it!"



And no sooner were the words out of his mouth than a town rose up from out of the ground and, as if out of thin air, many, many people appeared, naked as the day they were born, the poor things!



The fool took out the scissors, clicked them once and then again and said:

"Come, now, scissors, dress the townsfolk!"

And at once many carts loaded with clothing drove up. All the townsfolk had to do was to come up and dress themselves!



But this was not the end of it, for there was nothing for them to eat.

The fool got out his bag and untied it and at once loaves of bread came spilling out of it, one after another, enough for ten kingdoms!

The fool became king on the island and all the islanders were well pleased with him, which was only natural, for thanks to the switches, the scissors and the bag they never lacked for anything.

One fine day the young king was out taking a stroll on the sea-shore when he saw a ship far out at sea.

"Quick, now, where is my boat?" asked he.



A boat was brought him and he got into it and rowed up to the ship.

No sooner was he near her than he saw a princess on board, the very same one from whom he had stolen the magic mirror.

The king greeted the princess and invited her to visit his kingdom.

"Thank you, but I can't come with you," said the princess. "I must sail on. My magic mirror has been stolen from me, you see, and so has my golden ring. And whoever has my ring is the one I must marry. And what if he turns out to be an old man in his dotage or a wicked magician or some such monster? With my magic mirror to help him he'll live another hundred years and never rest till he finds me. But he won't think to look for me at sea, so that's why I have decided to live out the rest of my life sailing the seas."



At this the king took her ring off his finger and gave it to the princess, and the princess was overjoyed, for wasn't her husband-to-be young, handsome, and a king besides!

They stepped out on to the shore, and all who saw them greeted them joyously.

Soon afterwards the king and the princess were married and their wedding was celebrated in grand style, the townsfolk feasting and making merry for many a month on end.

As for the magic mirror, it was lost and has not been found to this day.